

THE MEDIEVAL BACKGROUND

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farther into the .tough world of practical
affairs men
will say,

Here nature first begins ,
Her farthest verge, and chaos to retire
As from her outmost works, a broken foe,

will not be known by this generation. What
is certain
is that, as in the analogous problem of the
relations
between Church and State, issues which
were thought
to have been buried by the discretion of
centuries have
shown in our own day that they were not
dead, but
sleeping. To examine the forms which
they have
assumed and the phases through which"
they have
passed, even in the narrow field of a
single country
and a limited period, is not mere
antiquarianism. It
is to summon the living, not to invoke a
corpse, and
to see from a new angle the problems of
our own age,
by widening the experience brought to
their con-
sideration.

In such an examination the sixteenth and
seventeenth
centuries are obviously a critical period.
Dr. Figgis'
has described the secularization of political
theory as
the most momentous of the intellectual
changes which
ushered in the modern world. It was not
the less
revolutionary because it was only
gradually that its
full consequences became apparent, so
that seeds
which were sown before the Reformation
yielded their

fruit in England only after the Civil War. The political aspects of the transformation are familiar. The theological mould which shaped political theory from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century is broken ; politics becomes a science, ultimately a group of sciences, and theology at best one science among others. Reason takes the place of revelation, and the criterion of political institutions is expediency, not religious authority. Religion, ceasing to be the master-interest of mankind, dwindles into a department of life with boundaries which it is extravagant to overstep*